



# STILL SERVING

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## CONGRESS DROPS SBP, CONCURRENT RECEIPT CHANGES



The 2007 National Defense Authorization Act was among the last pieces of legislation passed by Congress before its October recess. While disappointed in the absence of any relief in the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP), concurrent receipt or retirement age for reservists, military retirees did benefit from some provisions of the new law. There will be no increase in Tricare fees during FY 2007. Also dropped from the bill was a proposal to make it mandatory to use the mail-order pharmacy for all refills of maintenance medications. Authorization was granted for permanent identification cards for permanently disabled dependents of retirees. The Pentagon was asked to provide a report on giving members an option to have their Social Security numbers removed from all ID cards.

Congress chose not to end the offset of VA's Dependency Indemnity Compensation payments from DoD's SBP or to implement an accelerated "paid-up" SBP for those over 70 years old that have paid 30 years or more. Also failing to make the cut was a provision to provide full, immediate concurrent receipt for disabled retirees designated as "unemployable" by VA. A provision to reduce the minimum reserve retirement age by 3 months for every 90 days mobilized since 9/11 was also dropped from the final bill. During a lame-duck session in December, Congress staved off a 5.1 percent cut in Medicare and Tricare payments to doctors. It would have been effective in January, raising concerns that such a cut would reduce the number of doctors accepting Medicare and Tricare patients.

Members of The Military Coalition have begun "educational missions" on Capitol Hill to brief new faces in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. The number of veterans in Congress has been declining since 1994, when 44 percent had military service. Prior to the November election, 25 percent of the Congress were veterans. In the new Congress, that number drops to 23.5 percent. High on the Coalition priority list is to temper DoD's proposals for significant increases in Tricare fees and to expand concurrent receipt legislation. An eagle eye is also trained on impacts retirees may experience from 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) decisions.

## RETIREE COUNCIL INVITES COMMENTS

Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Don Peterson, Fairfax, Va., has scheduled the annual meeting of the Air Force Retiree Council for May 14-18 at the Air Force Personnel Center, Randolph AFB, Tex. Peterson, along with CMSAF (Ret.) Jim Finch, co-chair the council. They serve as the Air Force Chief of Staff's liaison with the retiree community. New co-chairs are expected to be named this year. Both of the incumbents are in their fifth years on the council. The co-chairs are also active in other activities involving thousands of Air Force retirees. General

Peterson ends a five-year term as president of the Air Force Association this summer. Chief Finch is on a search committee to find a successor. The council includes retired members from 13 geographical areas in the United States, the Pacific and Europe, representing more than 700,000 Air Force retirees. Council members oversee retiree interests within their areas of responsibility through 112 Retiree Activities Offices (RAOs). CMSgt. Chuck Lucas, Springfield, Va., represents Area XII, which includes Andrews AFB, Md., Bolling AFB, D. C. and Dover AB, Del. Retirees and their family members are encouraged to contact their nearest RAO with any suggestions or comments they wish to convey to the council. Each year the council considers 30-35 issues. Helping them to address these matters are presentations from the top staff agencies on the status of today's Air Force.

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# FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Col. (Ret.) John Moser, Director, Retiree Activities Office



Colonel Moser

Two of our strongest (yet unsung) supporters at Bolling AFB are the 579th Medical Group, commanded by Col. Brenda McEleney, and its Wellness Clinic, directed by Mrs. Nancy Leggett. You can be assured that without these caring individuals, and their personnel, you would not receive the medical support provided on Retiree Appreciation Day. Colonel McEleney has gone out of her way to assure that her limited resources are allocated to us for a thorough health screening. Although these tests are accomplished primarily with a single blood sampling, they require participation of 10 active-duty personnel on a non-duty day, after setting up equipment in The Clubs the day before. Then, the staff delivers the lab results within 10 days. Nancy Leggett is the chief honcho for this endeavor.

She supplements the blood tests in the club with other stations testing hearing, vision, osteoporosis, cancer and dietary guidance. All attendees take home a comprehensive guide on health care. Nancy has been making this volunteer contribution at Bolling's Retiree Appreciation Day for more than 20 years. She is a joy to work with. Both of these individuals help make our Retiree Day unique. I thank them, and their commanders, annually, but I wanted to share with you their efforts on our behalf. The next time you visit either clinic, let them and their staffs know of your appreciation. And while I have your attention, our retiree volunteer roster is shrinking severely. We are down to 12 members in the Retiree Activities Office. I desperately need your participation in OUR activities on YOUR behalf. Unless we get your assistance (one day a week for 5 hours) — if we do not pick up volunteer personnel soon — we may, in the very near future, become irrelevant.

**‘MESS HALL’ GONE, WHAT’S NEXT?** Retirees continually comment on today's “different” Air Force from the one in which they served. The head-shaking took on added emphasis when the “mess hall” at Bolling AFB passed into history. The annual cost of operating this modern dining facility was \$1.6 million and the cost of food \$540,000. The 53 airmen with meal cards now receive a basic allowance for subsistence. The savings to the Air Force is as much as \$1.9 million each year. The decision was welcomed by some airmen, citing difficulties in matching food service hours with their varied duty tours. Dormitory kitchen facilities lessen the impact along with a variety of eating establishments on base and a Navy dining hall at neighboring Anacostia NAS. Still, for a lot of graybeards, it's almost sacrilegious...no mess hall. What stories have been told, particularly about KP, “China Clippers” and the garbage rack. Stay tuned. You can almost hear Al Jolson...“You ain't seen nothing yet.”

**SUPPORT FROM THE TOP** “We have approximately 670,000 retired Air Force members in our Air Force family and many of them continue to put ‘service before self’ by working more than 1 million volunteer hours annually supporting both our active-duty forces and fellow retirees. We owe a debt of gratitude to those retirees who so generously volunteer their time at Air Force bases worldwide; without their assistance many commanders would find accomplishment of their mission difficult, and in some support areas, significantly impacted.”

Gen. T. Michael Moseley  
Chief of Staff, USAF



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# THOUSANDS ATTEND AIR FORCE MEMORIAL DEDICATION

President George W. Bush accepted the Air Force Memorial in a dedication ceremony attended by military leaders of the past and present, political and business representatives and thousands of ordinary citizens. “A soldier can walk the battlefields where he once fought,” said the president. “A marine can walk the beaches he once stormed, but an airman can never visit the patch of sky he raced across to defend freedom. And so it is fitting that from this day forward, the men and women of the Air Force will have this memorial.” The ceremony was the highlight of a daylong open house event. Huge screens allowed overflow visitors to view the ceremony on a bluff overlooking the Pentagon and Arlington National Cemetery. That crowd included H. Ross Perot Jr., chairman of the Air Force Memorial Foundation, then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. T. Michael Moseley. The Air Force Band performed while a video showed pilots climbing into World War II bombers to modern-day airmen in Iraq. Aircraft, ranging from World War One bi-planes to today’s stealth bombers and fighters, flew over the crowd, providing visual evidence of the evolution of military flight. The ceremony ended with the Thunderbirds and its bomb-burst formation, which inspired the design of the three-spires of the memorial. “We commemorate today the courage of the men and women who wear the Air Force blue,” said President Bush. “We remember those who gave their lives for their fellow Americans. We mourn their loss, we pray for their families and we consecrate their legacy.” The Air Force Memorial Foundation needs non-paid volunteers to provide information and, at times, guided tours for memorial visitors. Duties may also include raising and lowering flags and computer database entry support. Contact Pete Lindquist at [plindquist@airforcememorial.org](mailto:plindquist@airforcememorial.org) or (703) 247-5859 for complete information.



Photo by Adam Skoczlas  
Aurora, Air Force Academy falcon mascot, stretches his wings during Air Force Memorial dedication.

**DRAWDOWN HITS BASE NEWSPAPERS** - The Air Force drawdown has hit another institution – the base newspaper. Public affairs staffs have shifted their focus for news delivery to the World Wide Web. Printed newspapers will still be distributed at most bases, but responsibility will move to civilian publishers. “A web-based information-delivery system provides a number of benefits,” said Col. Michelle Johnson, director of Air Force Public Affairs. Among them: posting news releases in real time; providing access to home-station news from deployed locations; and using the same delivery system at home and while deployed. Public Affairs and other news producers will instantly post stories, photographs and artwork to their unit’s public web site rather than waiting for weekly publication. Air Force newspapers have been published at many bases for more than 50 years. The Bolling Beam ended 75 years of publication in December. A civilian publisher can continue to produce a newspaper for a base, but no longer under contract with the Air Force. The publisher will pull content from the base’s public web site and other sources. The Air Force decision mirrors the civilian news media. More people are turning to the Internet for their news. Fewer Air Force people were reading the base newspaper. Surveys reported the number of people reading every issue fell from 57 percent in 1994 to 38 percent in 2004. Each Air Force newspaper cost around 40 man-hours per week in page design and approval, making newspaper production a target for work savings.

**COURT DERAILS EX-SPOUSE CHALLENGES** - Supporters for changes in the 1982 Uniformed Services Former Spouse Protection Act have suffered dual setbacks. A federal appeals court rejected constitutional challenges to the act by 58 divorced retirees and active-duty members. The decision upheld an earlier district court’s rejection of a lawsuit filed by the USFSPA Legal Support Group on behalf of its 2,500 members. They contend the law violates divorced members’ right to due process and that states do not apply the law uniformly. The USLG plans to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, congressional interest is tepid, at best. Stricken from the final defense authorization bill last year was a provision to repeal the “10-year rule,” that supports court-ordered division of retired pay.

**TAX ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE** - Bolling’s 11<sup>th</sup> Wing Legal Office is one of several military installations in the National Capital Area offering free tax assistance to active duty and retired personnel. Volunteer income tax assistance representatives completed annual IRS training in January. Included was Lt. Col. (Ret.) Art Jones, Burke, Va., a five-year volunteer member of the Retiree Activities Office. Last year, volunteers in the Bolling Tax Center helped some 300 people file tax returns, saving more than \$34,000 in preparation fees. For information on making appointments for filing returns, call (202) 767-5297.



# SHORT SERVINGS

**Part B Costs Up \$5** - Basic Medicare costs for most senior retirees jumped 5.6 percent this year. The standard monthly premium for Part B, which covers doctor visits and outpatient hospital care, is up \$5 to \$93.50. It is the smallest increase since 2001. For the first time, more affluent retirees are paying \$106 to \$162 per month, depending on their income. Affected are those earning more than \$80,000 individually or \$160,000 as a couple.

**3.3 Percent COLA Increase** - Some 1.9 million military retirees and 50 million retired and disabled workers receiving Social Security payments are among recipients of a 3.3 percent increase in their monthly checks this year. It affects more than 174,000 military retirees living in the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia. The size of the annual cost of living adjustment is based on changes in the consumer price index. Last year's increase was 4.1 percent.



Secretary Gates

**New Defense Secretary** - Robert M. Gates became the 22nd Secretary of defense in December, succeeding Donald H. Rumsfeld. Gates, 63, had been president of Texas A&M University. Previously he served 26 years with the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Council. Rumsfeld began his second tour as secretary in 2001. He was the 13th secretary from 1975-77.

**Thunderbirds at Andrews** - The lone appearance of the U.S. Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron – Thunderbirds – in the National Capital area this year will be at Andrews AFB, Md., May 19-20. They will conclude the annual Armed Forces Week program each day.

The team is scheduled to perform 68 shows in 21 states and nine European countries this year, starting in March and running through mid-November.

**Maryland Retirees Get Tax Break** - Military retirees in Maryland may deduct \$5,000 of their military retired pay from 2006 state income tax returns. The legislative achievement is the result of a four-year campaign by the Maryland Retired Veterans Task Force. Among those testifying before the state legislature in favor of the tax exemption was retired Air Force Col. Paul Arcari, Clinton, Md., former director of Government Relations with the Military Officers Association of America. He also serves on the Air Force Association's Veterans/Retiree Council.

**Henderson Hall/Fort Myer Unified** - The Marine Corps' Henderson Hall and the Army's Fort Myer are among 12 military installations designated for realignment as a joint base under an initiative passed by the BRAC 05 Commission. The neighboring properties are located in Arlington, Va. Consolidation of installation management functions with Fort Myer is scheduled to be completed by October 1. The Army has already assumed responsibility for law enforcement functions. Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps moved to the Arlington Navy Annex Building in 1941.

**Alaska Memorial Honors Aviators** - American, Russian and Canadian dignitaries honored Russian and American aviators at a ceremony dedicating the Alaska-Siberia Lend-Lease Memorial in Fairbanks, Alaska. Aviators ferried more than 8,000 American-built warplanes from the Midwest through Canada and Alaska to Russia from 1942-45. Nearly 8,000 aircraft were flown by the Army Air Corps' 7th Ferrying Squadron from Great Falls, Mont., across Canada to Ladd Field in Fairbanks. Members of the Soviet Air Force then piloted the planes to the Russian warfront.

**Airman Vies in Miss USA Pageant** - An entry in this year's Miss USA Pageant exchanges her Air Force blues for a bathing suit. Miss Arkansas, who also answers to 2nd Lt. Kelly George at Little Rock AFB, Ark., is a member of the base public affairs staff. The pageant is scheduled for national television during the spring.



Lieutenant George

**CMSAF Parish Honored** - The Parish Enlisted Heritage Room was opened at the U.S. Air Forces in Europe headquarters, Ramstein AB, Germany, honoring former Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Sam E. Parish (1983-86) and USAFE's senior enlisted advisor (1977-80). "For USAFE to take this step, there's no greater honor than to help dedicate this heritage center." Chief Parish calls Mount Airy, Md., home.

# WALTER REED SERVICES REMAIN UNINTERRUPTED

Medical services offered at Walter Reed Army Medical Center are scheduled to be realigned within the National Capital Area by 2011, as part of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure decisions. Some services will move south to a new and larger DeWitt Army Community Hospital at Fort Belvoir, Va. Other activities will move to Bethesda, Md., and become part of a new tri-service medical center on the current National Naval Medical Center campus. The new center will be enlarged to accommodate the merger and will be designated the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, under command of a Navy admiral. Civilian employees will be part of the Navy civilian force. Army Maj. Gen. George W. Weightman, current commander of Walter Reed, emphasizes the tri-service staffing, adding “you have to have the vision of an organization taking care of patients, regardless of what the uniform is or who is the commander.”

Until 2011, new medical facilities will be designed and completed on the Bethesda campus and at Fort Belvoir. Services now offered at Bethesda, DeWitt, Walter Reed and the Malcolm Grow Medical Center at Andrews AFB, Md., will operate in a coordinated manner. Walter Reed and Bethesda have worked together for years. Some clinical areas are shared by both hospitals. For example, all obstetrical care is done at Bethesda while specialty and inpatient pediatrics and complex gynecology care are provided at Walter Reed. More than 90 percent of all graduate medical education training programs have been merged for five years with trainees moving between the two campuses. There are ambitious building projects at both Bethesda and Fort Belvoir. Projections will expand inpatient capacity at Bethesda to about 300 beds and at DeWitt to about 150 beds. Construction must be completed and services successfully realigned before closure of the present Walter Reed installation in northwest Washington.

**MORE MAIL-ORDER PRESCRIPTIONS SOUGHT-** Each prescription dispensed through Tricare’s Mail-Order Pharmacy (TMOP) saves the Pentagon an average of \$50 to \$150 dollars. Beneficiaries who use TMOP save 67 percent, too, since they get a three-month supply for the same co-payment that buys only a one-month supply in a retail pharmacy. Still, only about 6 percent of prescriptions are filled through the mail-order system. The most rapid growth is in the retail system — the one that’s most expensive for both the government and beneficiaries. A survey of Tricare mail-order pharmacy users last year found 97 percent indicated overall satisfaction with the service. These beneficiaries may save as much as 66 percent of the cost of using retail pharmacies on medications for conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure or asthma. Beneficiaries receive up to a 90-day supply of most medications for the same amount they would pay for a 30-day supply at a retail pharmacy. Pharmacists check mail-order prescriptions against the beneficiary’s medication history to guard against harmful drug interactions. Mail-order service is useful for drugs a beneficiary will use for long periods. Prescriptions for medications needed for short-term use may be filled at military treatment facilities or local retail pharmacies. Beneficiaries may enroll in the mail order program by mail or on line. For more information, call 1 866 363-8667 or visit [www.tricare.osd.mil/pharmacy/tmop.cfm](http://www.tricare.osd.mil/pharmacy/tmop.cfm)



**BENEFICIARY COST SHARES** - Medications on the first tier (formulary generics) are available through Tricare Retail Pharmacy for \$3 for up to a 30-day supply and through Tricare Mail Order Pharmacy for \$3 for up to a 90-day supply. Medications on the second tier (formulary brand name) may be purchased for the same number of days for \$9. Medications on the third tier (non-formulary) require a \$22 co-payment in both venues. Beneficiaries save up to 66 percent on their prescriptions when they use the mail-order pharmacy. Beneficiary co-payments are higher at non-network retail pharmacies. When a provider prescribes a medication, beneficiaries are encouraged to talk to that provider and see if a generic alternative is available that would provide the same clinical results in that drug class. This would save the beneficiaries money at the retail and mail-order pharmacy, and assist Tricare in containing health-care costs. They may also ask their provider if establishing medical necessity for the third-tier medication is appropriate for them. If medical necessity for a third-tier medication can be established, the co-payment reverts to \$9. Third-tier medications will not be available at military treatment facility (MTF) pharmacies unless medical necessity has been established and the prescription is written by an MTF provider. Not all tier-one and tier-two drugs are available at MTF pharmacies. Additional information on both Tricare Retail Pharmacy and Tricare Mail Order Pharmacy and the location of the nearest Tricare retail pharmacy may be accessed at [www.express-scripts.com/](http://www.express-scripts.com/) Tricare or by calling (866) 363-8667 for the mail-order pharmacy or (866) 363-8779 for the retail pharmacy.

# PERSONNEL REDUCTIONS NOT AN EASY TASK

Reducing the number of airmen on active duty is never easy business, but it's absolutely necessary to recapitalize today's service, says the Air Force's top personnel officer. "This is a challenging time for all people in the Air Force," said Lt. Gen. Roger A. Brady. "Our job is to get the right people in the right places, and make sure they are optimally trained, educated and equipped to be more agile with fewer people." General Brady said the service's force shaping initiative mainly affects the officer corps with the release of more than 3,000



General Brady

lieutenants. The enlisted corps faces downsizing as well. Overall, about 40,000 people will leave the service over the next three years. The money saved will go toward recapitalizing the service's aging aircraft and equipment. "When I joined the Air Force, we had almost a million people," he said. "Now, we're going down to 315,000. Over the years, we've evolved as a service, and this is a part of that evolution." "Officer internship is of great importance to me," he said, "but it's an area that had very little restraint. At one point, we had as many as 7,000 people in internships around the force — that's almost as many people who attend Air University." He said that in most cases, the officers would be sent to school right after their internship, which "doesn't make sense. That's not an effective way to do business." This year, only 50 officers will be in internship positions. The enlisted corps can expect a greater push for higher education. Hands down, our enlisted force is the best that ever existed," Brady said. "And a lot more is going to be expected

of them in the future. They're going to find themselves in positions where a bachelor's degree will be necessary." He said in the past, the push has always been for enlisted airmen to receive their associate's degree from the Community College of the Air Force. "But that's just not enough. Chief (CMSAF) Rod McKinley is very supportive of this as well, and we're both trying to figure out how to make it easier for enlisted airmen to pursue their education."

**KEEP YOUR PAY ACCOUNT UPDATED** - The Defense Accounting and Finance Service (DFAS) reminds all military retirees and annuitants to keep their pay accounts up to date. DFAS relies on you to provide current personal information to ensure the highest level of customer service. It is imperative that retirees notify DFAS promptly about any change in marital or family status, beneficiaries, mailing address and bank account information. This ensures that retirement pay is processed timely and correctly. Many retirees change residences with no change in their bank and assume that no contact with DFAS is necessary. **WRONG!** Your correspondence address on file at DFAS is the primary source for all Air Force mailings – including *Still Serving* and *The Afterburner*. If beneficiary information needs to be updated, customers can access a Designation of Beneficiary form at <http://www.dod.mil/dfas/retiredpay/beneficiarycard.html>. Changes to much of a retiree's pay account can be made via myPay or by calling the Retired/Annuitant Pay Customer Service Center at 1 800 321-1080. Retirees may also send an e-mail via myPay or by regular mail to: DFAS, U. S. Military Retirement Pay, P. O. Box 7130, London, KY 40742-7130. Annuitants write to U.S. Military Annuitant Pay, P.O. Box 7131, London KY 40742-7131. Using myPay is the most convenient and timely way to self-service a retiree's account.

**RETIREE RECEIVES \$10,000 SUGGESTION AWARD** - Rising college costs were eased a bit for retired SMSgt. Billy R. Caldwell after receiving \$10,000 for his idea to modify a software contract at the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), Chantilly, Va. It is the maximum award for suggestions accepted by the Air Force Innovative Development Awareness Program. Caldwell joined the NRO in 2002 after almost 8 years with the Air Force Personnel Center at Randolph AFB, Tex. He remained with the company after retirement from active duty in 2005. It's really a family affair. Retired MSgt. Pauline Caldwell is also on the NRO payroll. They live in Ashburn, Va., with their son, Dominick, 14. It was Caldwell's first submission to the program. His suggestion to eliminate operation and maintenance costs on licenses that had outlived their usefulness saved the Air Force more than \$667,000 annually – or \$6.667 million over the lifetime of a 10-year contract. "I had worked with the software and realized there was a different way to do the same job in a less expensive manner," he said.



# PENTAGON COURTYARD ICON TO BE REPLACED

The hot dog stand in the Pentagon's center courtyard, which was a source of Cold War intrigue, is being replaced. "Rumor has it that during the Cold War the Russians thought this was the DoD's most secret meeting room, and that the Pentagon was a fortress built around this hot dog stand," according to Brett Eaton, a Pentagon spokesman. Advised that military members entered the hot dog stand at about the same time every day, the Soviets reportedly concluded that the stand was the entrance to an underground bunker. "They thought the officers were going to get their top secret briefings in a protected area, but really they were just going to lunch," Eaton chuckled. The legend is spun by tour guides during tours of the building. The Pentagon was declared a national historic landmark in 1992. Because the courtyard is one of the five historically protected features of the building, the hot dog stand must be replaced by a building of roughly the same size, and the same shape as the Pentagon, Eaton said. The new building will cost about \$1.2 million. It will be the third permanent eatery on the spot. It is scheduled to open in September.



DoD Photo by Steven Donald Smith

**A familiar icon for Pentagon graduates, the center courtyard hot dog stand is being replaced this year.**

**MILITARY AWARDS PROGRAM UNDER REVIEW** - In an effort to provide clarity in awards standards across the military services, the Defense Department is making a comprehensive review of military awards and decorations. The review is expected to be completed in the next few months. Bill Carr, deputy undersecretary of defense for military personnel policy, said the changing nature of warfare in the global war on terror and lessons learned over the past few years have prompted some changes. "It's been about 10 years since we've reviewed our directive in a comprehensive way and, given the events of the global war on terror — our experience operationally in that environment, there are some changes we think we can make to give greater clarity and consistency to the awards," he said. One area under study is the criteria for "V" devices and Purple Heart Medals, he said. In the Army, the "V" device only is awarded for valor, whereas in the other services, it can be awarded simply for a member's presence in the theater of operations, Carr said. With Purple Hearts, the services have slightly different standards for level of injury, he added. Another area being addressed is the definition of a theater of operations when it comes to expeditionary medals. The Air Force defines the theater as the globe, because their pilots fly all over the world. Other services define a theater as a specific piece of ground. "The review is generated by questions that arose from the services, one by one, over the past couple of years," Carr said. "It was clear that it was time to conduct a comprehensive review."

**NEW UTILITY UNIFORM THIS YEAR** - The new Airman Battle Uniform (ABU) will be issued to deploying airmen this summer. Senior leaders want the warfighters to get the first ABUs along with airmen deploying in the air and space expeditionary cycle in May. Each will receive two sets of the new ABU. While the Army and the Air Force combat/battle uniforms look similar from a distance, the Air Force pattern includes a slate-blue shade in addition to foliage green, desert sand and urban gray shade. The pattern is pixilated or "digital" like the Marine Corps and Army but is based on a pixilated Vietnam-era tiger stripe pattern. The ABU is the first utility uniform designed in both male and female sizes to replace the "woodland" patterned Battle Dress Uniform. The ABU has been redesigned from the largely unpopular blue-tiger striped pattern with extra pockets. After initial distribution, airmen in basic training will be issued the ABU beginning in October. After that, the ABU will be available in AAFES outlets for purchase. Anticipated mandatory wear date is 2011.

**CASUALTY ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE** - The Defense Department wants to standardize its service casualty assistance programs. Current programs vary in support and service levels provided to surviving family members. Only the Air Force provides a full-time person to assist with benefits. A survivor notebook to help organize information available to them will be available soon and updated semiannually. The Casualty Assistance Office at Bolling AFB can be reached at (202) 404-3274; at Andrews AFB (301) 981-6432.

## FIRST WOMAN THUNDERBIRD PILOT PROUD TO SERVE

Women have served in the Air Force for years, making valuable contributions, but gender and race differences have never been an important factor in accomplishing the Air Force mission, according to the first woman pilot on the Air Force Thunderbirds. “What we need to concentrate on is what we have in common, which is that warrior spirit that’s



Major Malachowski

in all of our hearts, that has created us the way we are — to choose to be a part of something so much bigger than ourselves,” said Maj. Nicole Malachowski. She has been with the Thunderbirds for more than a year, flying the No. 3 right wing F-16 aircraft. “We are a team whose job is to represent the United States Air Force and the 530,000 men and women who wear Air Force blue with the honor, the respect and the dignity that they deserve,” she said. “We’re out there to represent what we know to be true — the fantastic hard work, dedication and professionalism of the men and women in our Air Force that we have the privilege to work alongside.” Malachowski first became interested in flying at the age of 5, when she saw an air show in her native Las Vegas. She set her sights on becoming an Air Force pilot and never looked back. She started flying with the Civil Air Patrol when she was 12, and by 16 was doing solo flights. After high school, she attended the Air Force Academy and has since seen various assignments as an F-15E pilot, including a tour in Iraq. Women have served in the Thunderbirds since 1974, just

not in a pilot capacity. Of the 130 officers and enlisted personnel on the Thunderbird team, 15 are women. Besides the six demonstration pilots, the Thunderbirds are made up of support personnel from about 25 different career fields. The Thunderbirds are on the road about 220 days during their eight-month air show season.

**RETIREMENT CEREMONY RECONNECTS PAIR** - Alicia Graham was one of more than 60 Air Force ROTC cadets commissioned at Ohio State University in 1986. Newly commissioned officers give a silver dollar to the first enlisted member who salutes them. SSgt. Jack Pio, who was in charge of student records for the detachment, did the honors. After 10 years in ROTC, he held 15 silver dollars, each marked to remind him of the events. Master Sergeant Pio retired in 2005. His new career took him to Eglin AFB, Fla., as a contractor. The new lieutenant settled into military life and her last assignment was with the same group at Eglin. The two soon realized their paths had crossed before. “We were talking about our children and our time in college, and that’s when I realized we were at Ohio State together,” Major Graham said. She jogged his memory with a photo showing her first salute. “I didn’t remember the picture, but that’s me; I recognized my watch,” Pio said. “Looking at my silver dollars, I found hers.” At Major Graham’s retirement ceremony, she reserved her last salute for Sergeant Pio. Her silver dollar once again changed hands as Sergeant Pio returned it, closing the loop in her military career. “It’s such a small world; how many people can say they found their sergeant who they first saluted,” Major Graham asked. “It doesn’t feel like 20 years.”

**KC-135 VETERANS REMINISCE** - Retired Lt. Col. Bill Fisher was among the first Air Force pilots to fly the KC-135 Stratotanker. Marking the 50th anniversary of the KC-135’s maiden flight, Colonel Fisher reminisced at Tinker AFB, Okla. Also on hand was retired CMSgt. Bobby McCasland. The chief is still in the KC-135 business. He’s a program manager for a team building a Test Tanker KC-135R. Fisher completed KC-135 training at Castle AFB, Calif. in 1957. “The KC-135 was just coming off the assembly line to replace the B-29,” Colonel Fisher said. “After flying the B-29, the KC-135 was like climbing into a Cadillac.” The colonel’s KC-135 career continued to 1973. He trained younger pilots, saw the world and spent the better part of three years in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War before retiring in 1977. Chief McCasland spent part of his 30 years on active duty as a member of a KC-135A crew with then Air Force Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Curtis E. LeMay. “By the time I left Washington, I had 5,000 hours on that one airplane,” he recalled. His test communication aircraft has a boom to support aircraft in air refueling such as the F-22 and C-5. It is scheduled for completion in March with delivery to Edwards AFB, Calif.

**NEW CYBERSPACE COMMAND** - Plans are underway to convert 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force into a Air Force Cyberspace Command, headed by Lt. Gen. Robert J. Elder Jr. Secretary of the Air Force Michael W. Wynne said: “The aim is to develop a major command that stands alongside Air Force Space Command and Air Combat Command as the provider of forces....that the American people can rely on for preserving the freedom of access and commerce, in air, space and now cyberspace.”



# 2007 VA INSURANCE DIVIDENDS ANNOUNCED

An estimated 1.2 million veterans will share \$369 million in annual insurance dividends this year, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Payments are made on policy anniversary dates each year to veterans with service between 1917 and 1956 who hold certain government life insurance policies. Amounts vary according to age, type of insurance and length of time the policy has been in force. Dividends come from the earnings of a trust fund into which veterans have paid insurance premiums over the years and are linked to returns on investments in U.S. government securities. World War II veterans holding National Service Life Insurance (“V”) policies comprise the largest group receiving 2007 insurance dividend payments, about \$286.3 million. Other World War II era veterans with Veterans Reopened Insurance (“J”, “JR” and “JS”) policies will in total receive dividends of \$10.1 million. Korean War era veterans with Veterans Special Life Insurance (“RS” and “W”) policies will receive dividends totaling \$71.6 million. Another \$1 million in dividends will be paid to veterans who served between World War I and 1940 and who hold U.S. Government Life Insurance (“K”) policies. No dividends are paid on Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance or Veterans Group Life Insurance. Veterans with questions about their policies may 1 800 669-8477, send an e-mail to [VAinsurance@va.gov](mailto:VAinsurance@va.gov) or go to [www.insurance.va.gov](http://www.insurance.va.gov).

**RETROACTIVE PAYMENTS UNDERWAY** - The Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are providing eligible retirees with their “complete” DoD military retirement entitlement to Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) and/or Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP) and/or VA disability compensation entitlement. Potential retroactive pay is due 140,000 retirees. Individual amounts will vary based on differences in disability amount, and length of retroactive period. Retirees entitled to additional money from DFAS will receive notification by mail of money due and a schedule of payments. DFAS began initial payments in September and VA in October. The basic criteria for a retroactive payment is for an individual in receipt of either CRSC or CRDP who received an increase in VA compensation since June 2003 for CSRC or January 2004 for CRDP which was not offset from the retired pay entitlement on a current basis. CRSC, which became effective in June 2003, provides non-taxable benefits to veterans disabled resulting from a combat injury. CRDP, effective in January 2004, provides taxable income to veterans disabled while on active duty (not necessarily in combat). Surviving spouses or deceased retirees’ estates may also receive compensation. Most payments are expected to be completed by mid-year. It could take up to six more months to pay the most complex retroactive pay accounts. These involve multiple VA rating adjustments since CRSC and CRDP began, shifts by retirees between these two types of payments, ex-spouse pay entitlements and any other issues that require lengthy record searches. Accounts with the oldest retroactive dates will be paid first. Questions from CRSC and CRDP recipients who believe they might qualify may call 1 877 327-4457.



**JOINT CLINIC OPENS** - The North Central Federal Clinic in San Antonio is the first Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense venture using joint leadership and staffing. The clinic is designed to improve access to medical care for VA and DOD beneficiaries living on the north side of San Antonio. Previously, those Air Force beneficiaries had to drive across town to Wilford Hall Medical Center at Lackland AFB. Some 5,600 Wilford Hall patients have been notified of their eligibility to being seen at the NCFC. Officials looked at active-duty dependents, retirees and retiree family members, enrolled in Tricare Prime, who live in the north central San Antonio area. Active duty personnel continue to be seen at their current care locations. Hospital officials, along with congressional and federal leaders, will follow the clinic operation closely for consideration of other joint facilities.

**LUMP-SUM COMPENSATION REJECTED** - A proposal for a lump-sum payment by Veterans Affairs to veterans with lower-rated disabilities instead of monthly compensation failed to pass muster with the Veterans’ Disability Commission. The 13-member commission, created by Congress in 2004, is reviewing VA’s disability benefits program. Pros and cons of a lump-sum payment were discussed at a public meeting of the commission. The proposal was aimed at veterans with 10 or 20 percent disability ratings, representing some 70 percent of those receiving VA disability compensation. Formal approval of the decision will be included with other panel recommendations to be sent to Congress later this year.

# YOU CAN ENJOY AIR FORCE BAND ON LINE 24/7



USAF Photo by SrA Michael Holzworth

**The Airmen of Note is but one of the groups featured on Air Force Bandstand.**

Air Force Bandstand offers a 24-hour Internet radio service with music by the Air Force Band and news from the Air Force News Agency. "It is one of several broadcast projects we've initiated in cyberspace in addition to some new but traditional radio and television products," said Col. Dennis Layendecker, Air Force Band commander and music director. "It serves audiences we know are increasingly turning to cyberspace for their entertainment and news — our deployed airmen." Bandstand is at [www.usafbnd.com/Bandstand.cfm](http://www.usafbnd.com/Bandstand.cfm). Listeners need a computer with a sound card and speakers and a broadband connection to the Internet. Bandstand works with all major media player plug-in software including Windows Media Player, Real Player and QuickTime.

The idea to stream band music onto the Internet was the brainchild of

CMSgt. David Nokes, chief of strategic communications for the band. "I was looking for ways to make our web site a better communication tool for the Air Force, not just a link to see the band's schedule of events," Chief Nokes said. "We wanted our Internet outreach to be something designed to respond in a day and age when more and more people are turning to the Internet for news and entertainment."

**SECOND CLUB CARD CHOICE TESTED** - Air Force Services is testing a program to allow club members to choose between the Private Label or MasterCard club membership card. The program will be tested in the Air Education and Training Command through June 20. Frank Black, chief of Air Force Clubs, said "one reason for not becoming a club member is having a credit card as a membership card. We are offering members a second choice. While both cards have the same club benefits, card member benefits are different. The MasterCard club membership card carries a credit line starting at \$1,000 and has a rewards program. The rewards program offers Air Force club members points for every dollar in purchases made using this card at all Services activities, exchange, commissary and off-base establishments. The Private Label card has a maximum credit limit of \$500 and can only be used on base at Services activities. There is no rewards program associated with the Private Label card.

**PASSPORT REPRIEVE FOR SOME** - Scheduled January deadlines for new U.S. passport requirements for cruisers were eased at the last minute by Congress. The new date for requiring cruise passengers to have passports is June 1, 2009. No extension was granted for airline travelers to international destinations. Passports are now mandatory. Included are those flying to Mexico, Canada, Bermuda and the Caribbean, who previously could use photo IDs and proof of citizenship, such as a birth certificate. Exempted are those flying to the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. The extension to June 1, 2009 also applies to those crossing land borders into the United States. Previously, the passport requirement for land travelers was to be effective January 1, 2008. The State Department says that fewer than 30 percent of Americans have passports. Pleas from the travel industry for more time to implement the new rules prompted the Congressional action.

**MARINE CORPS MUSEUM OPEN** - The new National Museum of the Marine Corps sits on a 135-acre site adjacent to the Quantico (Va.) Marine Corps Base. The 100,000-square foot structure features a 210-foot tilted mast and large glass atrium. The Leatherneck Gallery houses suspended aircraft along with tanks, landing vehicles and artillery pieces. Other galleries showcase the 231-year history of the Marines, including Iwo Jima battles in 1945 and Khe Sanh siege in 1968. The museum is expected to attract more than 300,000 visitors each year. Admission is free.

**VACATION CLUB OFFERS CONDOS** - The Armed Forces Vacation Club (AFVC) continues to attract hundreds of military retirees to space-available access to more than 3,500 resorts in some 80 countries. Since 1998 the club has rented vacation condos with weekly rental rates as low as \$300. There is no membership, enrollment or annual fees. Local morale, welfare and recreation programs receive payment for each condo rented. To reserve a condo or locate an available unit go to [www.afvclub.com](http://www.afvclub.com) or call the AFVC reservation center at 1 800 724-9988. You must provide your AFVC installation number to make a reservation. The number for Bolling AFB is 48. Numbers for other military installations may be obtained by calling the local Ticket and Travel office.

# JUST WHO IS AUTHORIZED TO SHOP IN EXCHANGES?

From Bolling AFB to Baghdad, worldwide military installations are home to more than 3,000 Army & Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) food, entertainment and retail options. Who's authorized to shop these facilities? "That's probably the most common question I receive," said AAFES' Senior Enlisted Advisor CMSgt. Bryan Eaton. "AAFES doesn't decide who is authorized." This begins with the House Armed Services Committee and ends with the installation commander. Military regulations require proper identification of authorized customers including uniformed personnel, members of the reserve components, family members, applicable Department of Defense (DoD) civilians, exchange associates and military retirees. Some government civilians also enjoy exchange shopping privileges when they are assigned or on temporary duty overseas; or "TDY and residing" in government quarters in the United States. Access of authorized customers' guests is regulated by installation commanders. While authorizations governing entry can vary from location to location, AAFES' 2,109 food facilities, including 1,806 name and signature brand outlets, are open to virtually anyone. DoD allows federal government employees and visitors to dine at AAFES restaurants as long as their orders are consumed on the installation. In the National Capital Area, AAFES announced plans to begin construction of a new shopping center on Fort Belvoir, Va., later this year on South Post, across from the new Town Center. About 120,000 authorized card holders in a 30-mile radius of Fort Belvoir use AAFES facilities on post. The new center is also an effort to accommodate 22,000 additional employees relocating to the post under BRAC 2005. About a third of the incoming employees are expected to be exchange customers.



**DECA BEGINS 16<sup>TH</sup> YEAR** - Congress and the Department of Defense created the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) in 1991 by consolidating the military services' retail grocery operations into one organization. "With sales at more than \$5 billion — all 'at cost' to our customers — this agency continues to save taxpayer dollars while delivering a vital military benefit important to military family quality of life and the recruiting and retention of military personnel," said Patrick Nixon, DeCA director." The commissary benefit itself is



almost 140 years old. Congress authorized the Army to sell food items, at cost, to officers and enlisted men, July 1, 1867. These sales were authorized at every Army post with a subsistence warehouse. In the 20th century, commissaries have become similar to civilian grocery stores. In the last 15 years, store facilities have been further upgraded, more people have become eligible to enjoy the benefit, and customer savings have increased. In 1991, commissaries provided average customer savings of 20 percent when compared with local grocery chains. Today, the average savings are more than 30 percent. The Congress-mandated surcharge has remained at 5 percent since 1983. The number of

items stocked by commissaries has increased, from about 13,000 in the largest stores in 1991 to 17,000 in 2006. National Guard and Reserve personnel, always key components of the military, were granted full-time commissary benefits in 2004. "There is a growing recognition that the commissary benefit serves our people in uniform wherever they are stationed," Nixon said. "When forces deploy, the families left behind depend upon their local community services, including the commissaries, to see them through tough, lonely times."

**MANY BENEFIT FROM GIFT CARDS** - Military families are increasing their demand for convenient Army & Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) gift cards. From the purchaser, to the recipient, to military Morale, Welfare and Recreation programs that ultimately benefit from exchange patronage, AAFES gift cards meet the entire military community's needs. While other cards may look similar to the AAFES card, there can be differences in fees and expiration dates. The FDIC advises that some outlets charge for use of their cards, while others impose expiration dates on use. AAFES limits military families' potential for risk with gift cards that never expire and are only subject to a \$2 monthly fee after 24 consecutive months of non-use. The red, white and blue cards can be used the same as cash at AAFES facilities around the world. To find out more about the AAFES Gift Card, see any cashier, log on to [aafes.com](http://aafes.com) or call 888-481-1550.

**SCHOLARSHIP DEADLINE NEARS** - Submissions for Scholarships for Military Children are due at a commissary by February 21. At least one \$1,500 scholarship will be awarded at every commissary with qualified applicants. Applications are available at all commissaries. All unmarried children of military families — including retirees — under age 21 with valid ID cards are eligible.



## RETIREE DAY A SATISFYING EXPERIENCE

Keynote speaker at the annual Bolling Retiree Appreciation Day was Maj. Gen. Robert L. Smolen, commander of the Air Force District of Washington. His informal presentation on his command and the drawdown in active-duty strength prompted an active question and answer session. Col. John Moser, Retiree Activities Office director, beamed at General Smolen's acknowledgement of the RAO's liaison role with the retiree community and the need for greater volunteer involvement from its constituency.

Comprehensive health screenings opened the 7-hour program, followed by ballroom presentations. Other adjuncts were base vehicle registration and DoD identification card renewals. A continental breakfast, luncheon options and attractive door prizes rounded out an informative session. Provisions of the FY2007 National Defense Authorization Act were explained by Col. (Ret.) Steve Strobbridge, Military Officers Association of America. This year's program is scheduled for Saturday, October 27.



**Lines formed early for base vehicle registration.**



**Colonel Moser greets 11<sup>th</sup> Wing CO Col. Kurt Neubauer.**



**Blood pressure checks were included.**

USAF Photos by SrA Alex Montes



**Retired Colonel Strobbridge provided legislative update.**



**Vendors had something for everyone.**



**General Smolen answers question from the audience.**